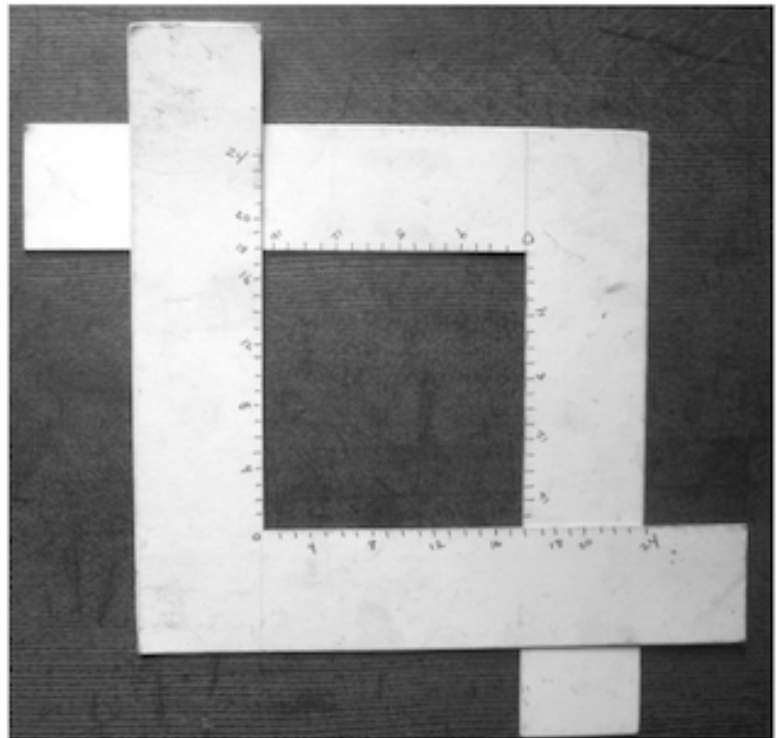


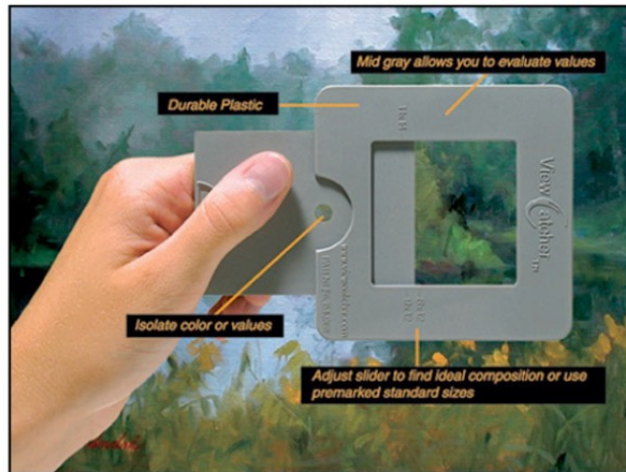
Viewfinder

A viewfinder is the essential tool for composition. Your viewfinder allows you to see how your still life, landscape, or figure will look on your surface. It allows you to try many formats without



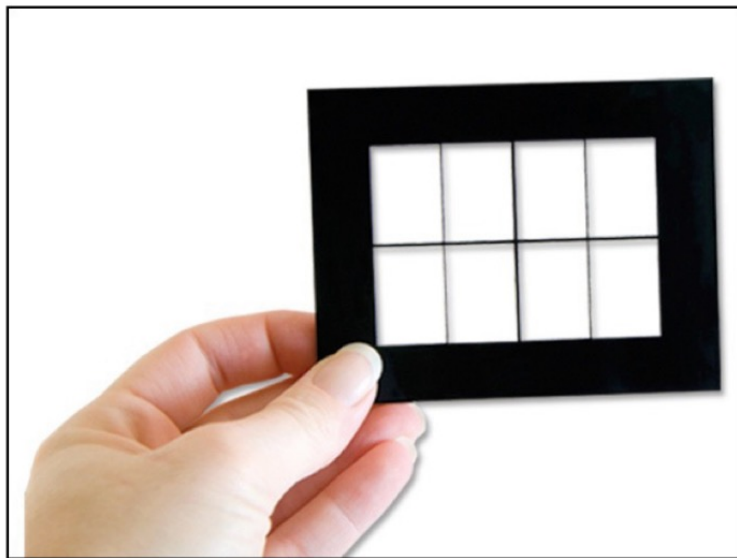
My viewfinder is cut from a matt gone wrong.
It is marked in 1/4 inches.
Each 1/4 inch represents an inch on the paper.

committing yourself to paper. I use my viewfinder to frame real life and to start to see how the spaces and shapes will fill up a format. I use a homemade, adjustable view finder rather than something that is fixed like an empty slide frame or a rectangle cut out of a piece of



The “View Catcher” is a small commercially made viewfinder.

cardboard. An adjustable viewfinder encourages me to try different formats rather than just the standard, conventional proportions for paper or canvas. Looking



The “DaVinci Artist Viewfinder” is not adjustable. It is a tool to help you get your perspective right by comparing your scene to the straight lines.

through the viewfinder, I can see how my objects will relate to the side of my paper and what shapes are created between the objects, the shadows, and the paper’s edge. The important thing is that my paper and my viewfinder have the same proportions as each other.

Even when working from photographs you have to make sure that your photograph and your paper have the same proportions. If you are trying to squeeze a long skinny view into a square or vertical shape, it will be impossible to draw it right. If you are not going to use paper the same proportion as the viewfinder, then your viewfinder will be worse than useless and will detract from what you are doing. I am hoping you have a good reason if you do not make your viewfinder and paper the same proportion. That reason better not be laziness.

How to Use a Viewfinder

The viewfinder allows you to look at the same scene in different formats. Here are five potential ways to crop the same scene. I have used a photograph to demonstrate this method, but usually I crop from real life. If you were working from a photograph, especially one you did not take, using the viewfinder to crop would make the composition your own.

8 x 16



12 x 12



12 x 16



6 x 12



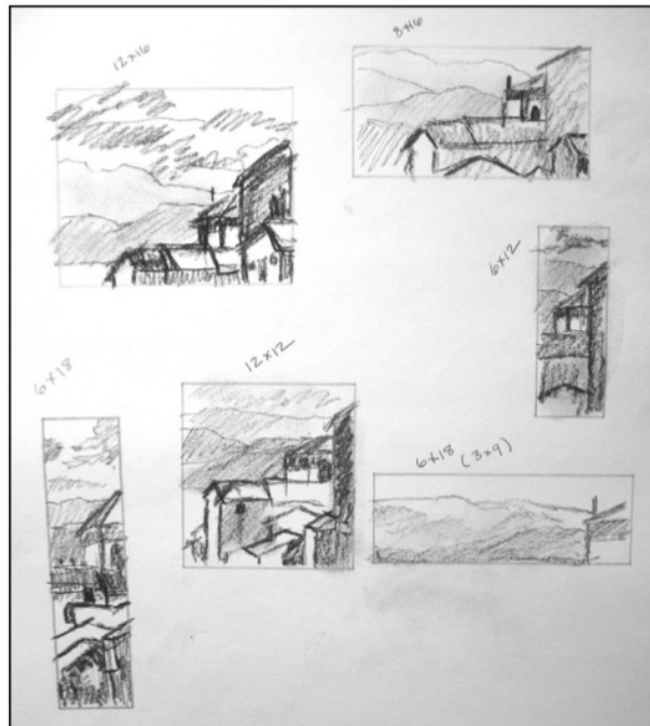
6 x 18



When painting outdoors, it can be confusing as to how much of the view can be included. Using a viewfinder helps me find my limits and the best format for the scene. As shown above I used my viewfinder to discover five potential formats for my painting. I could start my drawing now after picking one of the views or I could do thumbnail sketches to help me decide.

How to Do Thumbnail Sketches

Thumbnail sketches are great for beginners or people just starting to think about composition. Drawing thumbnail sketches ensures that you will think about composition. As an assignment, I had my college students do ten thumbnails and then pick one for a finished pastel. It was always their best composition.



These are the thumbnail sketches drawn from the different sizes of the same scene.

I used my viewfinder to do the thumbnail sketches. Each time I identified a potential scene, I laid the viewfinder down on the paper and traced the inside shape. Next I wrote the size beside the shape. Last I looked through my viewfinder at the scene and did a shorthand or thumbnail sketch to see how the composition

would work. A viewfinder with or without thumbnail sketches works well for still life, figure, and portrait.

I don't like to do thumbnails, because they take so much time and make me feel bored with the scene before I start. I look through my viewfinder and pick the scene without making the sketches. Probably it would be good for me to do thumbnails now and then. As you will see in the demonstrations in this book, I did not always pick the best composition.

Once you have done as much as you can to ensure a good composition with a viewfinder or viewfinder and thumbnail sketches it is time to start drawing. The first stage of drawing is a continuation of the composition stage.

